

A MESSAGE
TO ALL INTERESTED IN PROMOTING
THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF
IN EUROPE,
FROM THE
COLUMBIA INSTITUTION,
WASHINGTON, D. C.
U. S. A.

A MESSAGE
TO THE BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT OF
SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF,
AND TO ALL INTERESTED IN PROMOTING
THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF
IN EUROPE,
FROM THE
OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS
OF THE
COLUMBIA INSTITUTION FOR THE DEAF
AND DUMB,
AT WASHINGTON, D. C.,
U. S. A.

1897.

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*Ex-Postmaster-General of the United States,
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WASHINGTON, D. C., U. S. A.,

APRIL, 1897.

To the Boards of Management of Schools for the Deaf, and to all interested in promoting the education of the Deaf in Europe,

Greeting,

from the Officers and Directors
of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, at
Washington, D. C., United States of America.

The Institution committed to our care having completed the fortieth year of its existence, we deem the present a fitting occasion to answer in some detail the many inquiries which have come from friends of the cause in Europe concerning the progress of the education of the deaf in our country.

The oldest school existing in the United States was established in 1817, eighty years ago. The life of the Columbia Institution covers, therefore, just one-half of the period embraced in the history of schools for the deaf in America.

In 1857 there were nineteen schools, the buildings and grounds of which had cost \$1,371,736, the annual support of which involved an expenditure of \$285,416, and in which 1,771 pupils were being educated.

At the present time there are eighty-nine schools, with 11,054 pupils under instruction during 1896.

Thirty-four of these schools are in private hands, or are day-schools connected with the common-school system of some city or town. No statistics are available as to the cost of buildings and current expenses of these. For the fifty-five public institutions more than \$11,000,000 have been expended on buildings and grounds, and nearly \$2,000,000 are appropriated, annually, for current expenses. In every State of our Union public provision is made for the education of the deaf, thirty-nine States having schools of their own, and the six States without them providing for the education of their deaf children in the schools of the neighboring States.* Industrial departments exist in all but two of the public schools, and in fourteen of the private and day schools. In the larger schools from five to seventeen different industries are taught.

Up to the year 1867 the manual method of instruction prevailed in all schools, and very little speech was taught. But in that year several circumstances combined to call attention to oral teaching. Schools in which the oral method was to be used exclusively were established in New York and in Massachusetts. In April of that year the President of the Columbia Insti-

* The Census of 1890 showed that at that time there were 41,283 deaf-mutes in the United States.

tution was authorized by the Board of Directors to make an extensive examination of schools for the deaf in Europe, with the view of determining to what extent, if at all, it would be desirable to introduce the oral method into our institution. Forty-four schools were visited, and the report made to the Board recommended strongly that every deaf child should be given the opportunity to learn to speak.

The Directors of the Columbia Institution invited a conference of the principals of all the schools in our country to be held in Washington in May, 1868, to consider the recommendations of their president in regard to speech-teaching, and other matters of interest in the education of the deaf.

Fifteen principals, one vice-principal, and two ex-principals, among whom were the most prominent and influential in the country, attended this conference.

The policy of introducing the oral method was fully discussed, and the following resolution was unanimously adopted :—

“Resolved, That in the opinion of this Conference it is the duty of all institutions for the education of the deaf and dumb to provide adequate means for imparting instruction in articulation and lip-reading to such of their pupils as may be able to engage with profit in exercises of this nature.”*

* This meeting was the first of a series of Conferences of Principals which have been held quadrennially in other institutions for the deaf, the discussions of which have done much to develop and unify the system of instruction in our country.

The effect of this action, along with the influence of the oral schools and their friends, gave a notable impulse to the cause of oral teaching, with the result that within a few years all the larger schools carried into effect the recommendations of the Conference at Washington.

In his examination of European Schools in 1867, the President of our Institution was impressed with the fact that the best results which came under his observation were attained, not by the practice of any single method, but by a judicious combination of the two which had for many years been rivals in Europe. He therefore recommended the general adoption of a Combined System, in which the most valuable and efficient elements of the manual and oral methods should be retained; and that the use of these respectively should depend on the capacities and needs of those who were to be educated.

Careful experiment in the older schools, and frequent observation of results in the pure oral schools, has led to a prevailing conclusion in the minds of teachers of the deaf in our country that a considerable proportion of the deaf as a class are not capable of success in speech. And a majority of our teachers are of the opinion that under many conditions certain features of the manual method may be made use of to advantage.

These views were given an authoritative sanction at

a meeting of the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf held in California in 1886, at which advocates of both methods were present, by the unanimous adoption of the following preamble and resolution :

“*Whereas* the experience of many years in the instruction of the deaf has plainly shown that among the members of this class of persons great differences exist in mental and physical conditions and in capacity for improvement, making results easily possible in certain cases which are practically, and sometimes actually, unattainable in others, these differences suggesting widely different treatment with different individuals, it is, therefore,

“*Resolved*, That the system of instruction existing at present in America commands itself to the world, for the reason that its tendency is to include all known methods and expedients which have been found to be of value in the education of the deaf, while it allows diversity and independence of action, and works at the same time harmoniously, aiming at the attainment of an object common to all.”

This broad platform was made a part of the Constitution of the Convention, adopted at Flint, Michigan, in 1895, and the Convention has since been incorporated by a special act of the Congress of the United States.*

* The Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf is an organization, membership in which is open to all persons actually engaged in the education of the deaf. Its general meetings are held triennially, and local meetings may be held more frequently. Fourteen general meetings of the Convention have been held, with great profit, at different points in the United States and in Canada.

An association is also in existence “to promote the teaching of

The manner in which the oral teaching of the deaf has become general in our country is deserving of special notice.

The purely oral schools, the first of which were established thirty years ago, have not become numerous.

Out of the fifty-five public schools of the country, only five sustain the pure oral method, and these five contain but 567 pupils out of 10,086 in all the public schools. But speech is taught in every one of the other schools, in connection with a greater or less use of features of the manual method. In the fifty public schools in which a Combined System prevails, with a pupilage of 9,519, more than 4,000 pupils are taught speech.*

From these statements, two conclusions may be drawn: (1) that in the public schools for the deaf in the United States all the pupils are given the opportunity to learn to speak; and (2) that with those who cannot attain substantial success, instruction in speech is not continued.

The present attitude in our country, after thirty

speech to the deaf," which has had several meetings, the effect of which has been to heighten public interest in this feature of the education of the deaf.

* The thirty-four private and day schools average about twenty-five pupils each, having in all, during 1896, 968 pupils, about one-half of whom were in pure oral schools.

years of effort to supplant the manual method by the oral, is, therefore, unmistakably in favor of a Combined System, in which the best effects of both methods may be secured.

The work to which the Columbia Institution has chiefly devoted itself since its incorporation has been the establishment and development of an advanced department, a college, in which the education of the deaf might be carried forward so as to include courses of study in the higher Mathematics and Sciences, General History and Literature, Sociology and Philosophy, the Ancient and Modern Languages, and such technological studies as the deaf might be found capable of pursuing with profit.

The success of this undertaking, entered upon in 1864, has justified, beyond all question, the wisdom of those who devised and proposed it to Congress.

Five hundred and eight young men and young women have received the training of the College, and have proved by their intellectual development that deafness presents no obstacle to a very high degree of mental culture.

The practical advantages of the higher education to these young people have been marked and great, as will be shown by an enumeration of some of the occupations that have opened to them in consequence thereof.

In 1893 the following report was made :—

“ Fifty-seven who have gone out from the College have been engaged in teaching; four have entered the Christian ministry; three have become editors and publishers of newspapers; three others have taken positions connected with journalism; fifteen have entered the civil service of the Government—one of these, who had risen rapidly to a high and responsible position, resigned to enter upon the practice of law in patent cases in Cincinnati and Chicago, and has been admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of the United States; one is the official botanist of a State, who has correspondents in several countries of Europe who have repeatedly purchased his collections, and he has written papers upon seed tests and related subjects which have been published and circulated by the Agricultural Department; one, while filling a position as instructor in a Western institution, has rendered important service to the Coast Survey as a microscopist, and one is engaged as an engraver in the chief office of the Survey; of three who became draughtsmen in architects’ offices, one is in successful practice as an architect on his own account, which is also true of another, who completed his preparation by a course of study in Europe;* one has been repeatedly elected recorder of deeds in a southern city, and two others are recorders’ clerks in the West; one was elected and still sits as a city councilman; another has been elected city treasurer and is at present cashier of a national bank; one has become eminent as a practical chemist and assayer; two are members of the Faculty of the College, and two others are rendering valuable service as instructors therein; some have gone into mercantile and other offices; some have undertaken business on their own account; while not a few have chosen agricultural and mechanical pursuits, in which the advantages of thorough mental training will give them a superiority over those not so well educated. Of those alluded to

*This young man prepared, two years ago, a complete set of plans and specifications for a dormitory for our institution, in accordance with which the building was satisfactorily erected.

as having engaged in teaching, one has been the principal of a flourishing institution in Pennsylvania; one is now in his second year as principal of the Ohio Institution; one has been at the head of a day-school in Cincinnati, and later, of the Colorado Institution; a third has had charge of the Oregon Institution; a fourth is at the head of a day school in St. Louis; three others have respectively founded and are now at the head of schools in New Mexico, North Dakota, and Evansville, Indiana; and others have done pioneer work in establishing schools in Florida and in Utah."

In 1891 a Normal Department was established in connection with the College, the object of which is to train a few well-educated young men and women, each year, in both the manual and oral methods of teaching the deaf. The students in this department are not deaf-mutes. Consequently, they are able to render valuable service in the correction and development of the speech of the regular students of the College.

Twenty-six young men and six young women have been trained in our Normal Department, a majority of whom, having received the Bachelor's degree in other colleges, have been made Masters of Arts at the conclusion of their course with us.

The regular students of our College receive degrees in the Arts, in Science, Letters, or Philosophy, according to the courses of study which they have pursued.

The liberality of Congress in providing nearly all the funds needed for the upbuilding and support of the College has been marked from the year of its establishment.

Suitable grounds and temporary buildings were provided by Congress before the College was opened ; and, from time to time, additions have been made until the aggregate of the benefactions of the Government for grounds and buildings exceeds half a million of dollars.

The annual appropriation by Congress for the support of the College is over fifty thousand dollars, and sixty poor students from different parts of the country are received without charge for board and tuition. The number of students under instruction in 1896 was one hundred and twelve. After what has been said as to our opinions concerning methods, it is hardly necessary to add that the teaching of the College is on the Combined System.

Opportunity is given to every student to learn to speak—frequent drill in speech is afforded to all who need and desire it. Much intercourse between students and their instructors and among students themselves is by speech.

The chief use of the sign-language is in public lectures and addresses. The manual alphabet is largely employed in conducting the recitations of the classroom, for the reason that it is believed to furnish the best means of quick and accurate communication for work in which an entire class can take part understandingly.

In closing this communication, the Officers and Di-

rectors of the Columbia Institution, speaking for their colleagues throughout the United States, beg to acknowledge the debt of gratitude due from our country to Europe in the matter of the education of the deaf ; for we have always to remember that the essential features of the methods we now make use of have come to us from the schools of the Old World, the founders and promoters of which will ever be held in grateful remembrance by the deaf-mutes of America and their friends.

And we hope it will not be felt in any quarter that the suggestions of this paper are offered in any spirit of self-glorification.

We and our predecessors have endeavored to discharge as faithfully as possible, during forty years, the duties devolved upon us by the Government of the United States. We have striven to discover and put in practice the methods which seem likely to produce the best results. We have undertaken to solve the problem of the higher education of the deaf. And it will be a source of happiness to us if the presentation of the results of our labors to our colleagues in Europe shall lead to the betterment of the condition of the deaf in that part of the world. For if this shall come to pass, we shall feel that something, however little, will have been done towards discharging the obligations under which we have long rested.

Invoking the continued blessing of Heaven on the cause we all have at heart, we are, with assurances of the highest consideration,

Faithfully yours,

*William H. Triley
Edward M. Gallaudet,
John B. Wright.
Lewis Johnson Davis*

*Henry L. Daevers
Dr. R. Hawley
Edward C. Anthony*

*Serena E. Baume
Joseph. D. Sayres
Byron Sunderland
John W. Foster,
William L. Wilson.*

